

SUMMARY OF NELAC 8

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ACCREDITATION CONFERENCE EIGHTH ANNUAL MEETING TAMPA, FLORIDA July 09-12, 2002

INTRODUCTION

The Eighth Annual National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC 8) was held July 09-12, 2002, at the Wyndham Harbour Island Hotel in Tampa, Florida. The meeting was co-sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Approximately 320 individuals participated.

Registrants included representatives of local and county government, representatives of state and territorial government, representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) headquarters programs and regional offices, and representatives of other federal government organizations. From the private sector, there were representatives from environmental testing laboratories, laboratory accreditation organizations, consultants, academia, environmental interest groups and industry.

OPENING PLENARY

Jeanne Hankins welcomed attendees and gave various announcements concerning the Conference. She then introduced Silky Labie, Chair of the Board of Directors of NELAC, the other Board members, and the committee chairs.

An address was given by Charles Hartwig, NELAC Chair Emeritus, titled "A Walk Down Memory Lane" in which he gave a description of the beginnings of NELAP.

Edward Conklin, Director of the Resource Assessment and Management Division for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, gave the keynote address. He explained the purpose and responsibilities of the DEP and its involvement in NELAC and the laboratory community. He gave a brief description of how the DEP and EPA programs have been instrumental in environmental recovery and the start of organizations such as NELAC. He noted that all of these programs working together towards a common goal would ensure a successful positive experience for the future.

Judy Duncan, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and Chair of the Accrediting Authority Review Board (AARB), gave a presentation on activities of the AARB over the last year.

Steve Arms, Florida Department of Health and member of the NELAP AAs, gave a presentation on the Accrediting Authority Work Group.

REMARKS FROM THE CHAIR

Ms. Labie welcomed attendees to the Conference and gave a brief report on the number of registrants. In her opening remarks, she provided a brief description of how the NELAC process worked, and set the stage for the Conference's consideration of the proposed restructuring.

COMMITTEE WORKING SESSIONS

Following the opening plenary session, concurrent working sessions were held for all 12 standing, administrative, *Ad Hoc* committees, and the AARB. Progress made by each committee, as well as principal unresolved issues, were presented in the closing plenary session. All working sessions were held in an open forum format in which all attendees were encouraged to participate.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS B SILKY LABIE

The Board of Directors of (NELAC) held a joint meeting with the committee chairpersons on July 09, 2002. Ms. Judy Duncan, Chair of the AARB, summarized the annual report to be presented to the Conference.

The Board reviewed a letter received from Henry Longest requesting input and assistance on the criteria document for proficiency test providers. It was requested that Barbara Burmeister present this letter to the Proficiency Testing Committee for review and recommendations.

ENVIRONMENTAL LABORATORY ACCREDITATION BOARD B ZONETTA ENGLISH

Several issues were discussed during ELAB's session including: the restructuring of NELAC; analyte groups; a communication mechanism between standards development and standards adoption organizations; and Ms. Hankins reported on the status of funding to NELAC from the EPA.

PROGRAM POLICY AND STRUCTURE/TRANSITION B KENNETH JACKSON AND PAUL KIMSEY

The Program Policy and Structure and Transition Committees met on Tuesday, July 09, 2002. The restructuring of NELAC was the predominant issue. The proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws as developed by the Program Policy and Structure and Transition Committees were presented.

Two standards development organizations gave presentations on the benefits of their organization in developing standards, pointing out the strengths and similarities of their organization to NELAC. It was stressed that any consensus standards developing organizations may, at any time, present the new NELAC with standards to consider.

PROFICIENCY TESTING B BARBARA B BURMEISTER

Several issues were discussed during the Proficiency Testing Committee's session at NELAC 8, which included various proposed changes to Chapter 2 of the Standards. Ralph Obenauf presented an update concerning changes being made to the technology, method and analyte codes. Dr. Mudambi presented the report concerning uniform electronic proficiency test data format. Ms. Burmeister provided the report concerning the evaluation of acceptance criteria. Larry Jackson presented a report concerning acceptance criteria by preparation method. Mr. Obenauf presented a report concerning ongoing monitoring criteria for proficiency test providers. Carl Kircher presented a report concerning evaluation of the PTOB/PTBA organizations. Ms. Burmeister gave a report concerning NIST. John Griggs reported that the Radiochemistry Subcommittee would be discussing acceptance criteria for other matrices in future teleconferences.

ON-SITE ASSESSMENT B ALFREDO SOTOMAYOR

The On-Site Assessment Committee focused on four main issues during their session at NELAC 8. The first included the Confidential Business Information (CBI) section to address applicability of state regulations, which was modified. The second amended biological technical disciplines for assessor training. The third entailed a comprehensive appendix (Appendix C) on elements of an Accrediting Authority's SOPs for on-site assessments. The fourth unveiled plans for an assessor electronic forum.

Some unresolved issues that came out of the Committee's session included the need for (1) language regarding minimal technical qualifications for assessors, (2) evaluation of all test methods over time, (3) defining the words *findings* and *deficiencies* in assessment reports, and (4) evaluation of data integrity during on-site assessments.

Future plans include resolving the above issues as well as to host the assessor electronic forum on October 15, 2002.

ACCREDITATION PROCESS B GLEASON WHEATLEY

Mr. Wheatley reported that numerous proposed changes are being made to section 4.0 of the Standards. He also reported that the Accreditation Process Committee met with the Field Activities Committee in a joint teleconference to discuss the definitions of *mobile laboratory* and *field measurement*. It was decided that the Accreditation Process Committee would propose the definition for *mobile laboratory*. A change was made in response to a suggestion from an accrediting authority concerning Section 4.4.4. An issue was raised regarding Section 4.1.8, merging or consolidating laboratories, and how they can move from one building to another and retain separate accreditation but cannot combine two or more laboratories under one accreditation. It was decided that the Committee would discuss NELAC methods versus regulatory method requirements at future teleconferences.

QUALITY SYSTEMS B FREDERIC SIEGELMAN

Dr. Siegelman maintained that in order to remain consistent with the International ISO Standards, it is necessary to reorganize the NELAC Standards to match ISO 17025. Therefore, one of the key issues was the integration of ISO 17025 into Chapter 5.

Also presented were the proposed changes to:

- the asbestos portion of Appendix D,
- data integrity,
- the microbiology sections of Chapter 5,
- the chemistry section of Chapter 5,
- the laboratory control sample (LCS), and
- the matrix spike/matrix spike duplicate (MS/MSD).

Ken Jackson presented a progress report of the PBMS Subcommittee's activities to date. The Subcommittee has been working on reviewing the ISO 17025 language that pertains to method selection/modification/validation, as well as revising Appendix C to incorporate a tiered approach to method evaluation/validation. It is the goal of the Subcommittee to have this document ready for discussion at NELAC 8i, and up for vote at NELAC 9.

ACCREDITING AUTHORITY B LOUIS JOHNSON

The main issue discussed during the Accrediting Authority's Committee session at NELAC 8 was proposed changes for Chapter 6 of the Standards. Two issues the Committee will discuss at future teleconferences are timelines for NELAP Accrediting Authority's certification and section 6.4.3.g, regarding the number of times a corrective action can be done after an accrediting authority's recognition by NELAP has been denied or revoked.

FIELD ACTIVITIES B BARTON SIMMONS

The Field Activities Committee presented Chapter 7 during their session at NELAC 8. Minor changes were made to present during the voting session. The Committee, as well as attendees, also discussed the definitions of *mobile laboratory* and *field measurement* at the Field Activities Committee Session.

Some unresolved issues that came out of the Committee's session include the need to reference Chapter 7 with other chapters and to define the terms *split sample* and *confirmation sample*.

Future plans include resolving the above issues as well as to determine priorities for other matrices for 2003. The Committee would also like to see a smooth transition of the Field Standard development.

REGULATORY COORDINATION B KEVIN COATS

Kevin Coats, Chair of the Regulatory Coordination Committee, provided his committee report. Mr. Coats reviewed the model state legislative language, the purpose of which was to familiarize attendees with the model, as well as to promote input for specific comments or need for additional model legislation.

As a tool to determine the need for additional model legislative language, the Regulatory Coordination Committee has created a two-tiered Accrediting Authority survey.

The annual regulatory survey is generated to apprise NELAC or NELAC committees of any regulations that would impact either NELAC itself or the laboratory accreditation process. It is, listed under *Center for Intelligent Information Retrieval*, which contains government regulatory and deregulatory surveys. The process is currently being evaluated for improvement (e.g. improve the referral process) and will be presented to the Board before NELAC 8i.

Mr. Coats is working on the possibility of having his committee generate comments for NELAC on rules being contemplated on state and federal levels. More details on this will be presented at NELAC 8i.

MEMBERSHIP AND OUTREACH B SHERRY CLAY

The Membership and Outreach Committee had four highlights and substantive issues from their Committee session at NELAC 8. The first included the NELAC website and ideas to make it more user friendly. The second was an idea from an attendee who suggested that at the beginning of each NELAC Conference, a NELAC 101/Orientation should be held to educate first time attendees about the history of NELAC. Members welcomed this idea and will encourage NELAC 101 to take place for NELAC 8i. The third issue involved the distribution of NELAC information and possible ways to reach people for an increased membership. The fourth revolved around a comment made from an attendee regarding the Standards, to display their effective date, not the date voted in.

Future plans include getting field testing people more involved as well as recruiting organizations to distribute NELAC information.

NATIONAL DATABASE B MATTHEW CARUSO

Matthew Caruso, Chair of the National Database Committee, presented his report. The National Database is not yet operation since the funds allocated to its development have been depleted. A subcommittee has been formed to investigate if alternatives to an EPA operated database are available.

ACCREDITING AUTHORITY REVIEW BOARD B JUDITH DUNCAN

Ms. Duncan presented a report that included copies of the Annual Report, policy and procedures that the AARB has been developing, recommendations that have been presented, and the Charter of the AARB. Mr. Kircher, Florida Department of Health, presented a report regarding the Quality System and Quality Manual for the AARB. An attendee presented a proposal that the AARB should send out questionnaires, after a review, to the Accrediting Authorities for feedback concerning improvements that may help the

review process. The AARB is planning a visit to the NELAC office in Las Vegas to review the record keeping process. This coming year the AARB is planning to complete the review of the NELAP program using the new quality system, complete a review and comparison of the renewal process, review new Accrediting Authorities, hear any appeals, continue to review the NELAC Standards, and report on how the review was accomplished.

CLOSING PLENARY

Ms. Labie shared some memorable moments experienced during her tenure with NELAC. She thanked her family; the Anteon staff; the conference manager, Dawn Jenkins; her staff from Florida DEP.

Two committees were recognized by the NELAC Board of Directors for their outstanding work during the past year: Program Policy and Structure Committee and the Transition Committee. Ms. Labie also thanked Ed Kantor for his outstanding work with the EPAL program.

Ms. Labie introduced incoming NELAC Chair Dr. Paul Kimsey. Dr. Kimsey noted that some big decisions were made during this Conference and that the work was still not over for the Program Policy and Structure and the Transition Committees. The goals for the next year are to assure a smooth transition to a new constitution and a new structure, as well as to revitalize the strategic plan, including recommendations that were developed in December 2001, and work on the NELAC 8i (Santa Fe November 18-21) & NELAC 9 (San Diego, June 1-7 2003) meetings.

Ms. Hankins noted that the Standards and meeting minutes were expected to be published on the website within six to eight weeks. The deadline for comments to the chairs on further changes to the Standards was set as September 14, 2002.

Ms. Hankins thanked all who attended for their participation and encouraged all to attend the Interim Meeting in Santa Fe.